

**Testimony in Opposition to
S.B. 949, An Act Concerning the Establishment of a Money-Follows-the-Child
Approach to Funding Public Education**

Lisa Hammersley, Executive Director
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Chairmen McCrory and Sanchez, Ranking Members Berthel and McCarty, and distinguished members of the Education Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in opposition to S.B. 949, An Act Concerning the Establishment of a Money-Follows-the-Child Approach to Funding Public Education.

While we appreciate and respect any effort to improve Connecticut's education finance system and address inequities in education funding, our organization cannot support S.B. 949 and its money-follows-the-child approach. We cannot support this approach because the proposal exacerbates the state's already alarming racial funding gap.

Connecticut has a \$639 million funding gap between districts serving majority White student populations and all other school districts. Based on our analysis of S.B. 949 and its changes to the Education Cost Sharing (ECS) formula, the bill would exacerbate – not decrease – this alarming racial funding gap.

The exacerbation of the racial funding gap is attributed to two key components of the bill. First, the bill will modify how students are counted in the resident student count of sending districts. Currently, if a student resides in New Britain and attends a CREC magnet school, the City of New Britain counts the student in their resident student count and therefore receives ECS monies associated with that student. CREC then bills New Britain tuition for the cost to educate that student.

Under this proposal, the student attending the CREC magnet school would not be included in the resident student count of New Britain resulting in New Britain receiving less ECS funding. Given that there is a significant amount of choice being exercised in the Hartford region as a result of the *Sheff* stipulated agreements, this bill would result in significant funding reductions for cities like Hartford, New Britain, and East Hartford, all of which are already currently under resourced.

S.B. 949 then compounds its negative impact on the racial funding gap by requiring these under resourced communities where the child resides to pay their "local" share to the school district educating the student. Additionally, S.B. 949 would require districts sending students to more suburban districts as part of the Open Choice program to

begin paying tuition to those receiving districts for each student. This would further reduce available resources for the state's highest-need districts and could cause significant financial stress on districts like Hartford, which has more than 2,000 students participating in the Open Choice program.

Connecticut's funding gap is unacceptable and it is a gap that has been exacerbated, and become all the more visible, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on public education and its disproportionate impacts on communities of color. We ask Committee members to reject any proposal that would make this gap even worse.

While we respect the work that has been done on this proposal, S.B. 949 does not create the equitable, fair, and student-centered approach that Connecticut's education finance system so desperately needs. For these reasons, we ask Committee members to vote against S.B. 949.

Thank you again for allowing me the opportunity to provide testimony regarding this proposal, and please feel free to reach out to me via the contact information below should you have any questions.

Sincerely,

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About the School and State Finance Project

Founded in 2015, the School and State Finance Project is a nonpartisan, nonprofit policy organization, focused on education funding and state finance issues, with a commitment to providing independent analysis, building public knowledge, improving transparency, and developing fair, sustainable solutions.

The organization strives to serve as a trusted, independent source of accurate data, information, and research, and is focused on:

- Increasing awareness and building public knowledge about Connecticut's education finance system, state budget, and overall fiscal health;
- Improving transparency around Connecticut's education and state finances;
- Working collaboratively to develop thoughtful, data-driven solutions that address Connecticut's education funding and state finance challenges; and
- Providing technical assistance to partner organizations seeking to solve education finance-related challenges.

For more information about the School and State Finance Project, visit www.schoolstatefinance.org.